

**Reconsidering Rousseau's *Le devin du village*:
An Opera of Surprising and Valuable Paradox**

Edward Green

Louis XV, it was widely rumored, couldn't hold a tune. Yet, in October of 1752 he was heard again and again singing the melodies of a work which had just premiered at Fontainebleau: Rousseau's *Le devin du village*.¹ Madame de Pompadour was pleased, as well: so taken was she with this short opera ("intermède") that at a private performance in March 1753 at her country home (Belle Vue) she herself appeared on stage – not as the shepherdess, Colette, however, but as her faithless shepherd, Colin.² The work swiftly became known outside of aristocratic circles. That same month, March 1753, the Paris Opera took it up, and it proved so popular it was kept in repertoire for 60 years, an unprecedented run. In all, there were nearly 400 Parisian performances throughout the life of its career.

Before long, Rousseau's work received yet another form of critical acclaim: successful parody – Favart and de Guerville's *Les amours de Bastien et de Bastienne*, which played to sold-out houses at the Comédie-Italienne.³ Nor was the popularity of *Le devin* limited to France. In terms of its story (and in varying degrees its music) the opera became a pan-European phenomenon. In 1766, a slightly expanded version by Charles Burney entitled *The Cunning Man* was

¹ Pierre Jélyotte, who played Colin in the original cast, wrote the composer: "The whole court is enchanted with your work; the King, who as you know, doesn't like music, sings your airs all day long with the falsest voice in this kingdom, and is asking for a second performance this week." Cited in Arthur Pougin's *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, musicien*. (Paris: Fischbacher, 1901), 67.

² Too much should not be read into this. Colette's part is soprano, with a relatively high tessitura; quite possibly the vocal range of his part (tenor) suited her voice better.

³ In fact, there were three separate parodies of *Le devin du village* performed in Paris between 1753 and 1764 – each, on its own terms, a theatrical success. See Mark Darlow, "Les parodies du *Devin du village* de Rousseau et la sensibilité dans l'opéra-comique français," *La Revue de la Société Liégeoise de Musicologie*, 13/14 (1999): 123-141.

packing them in at Drury Lane;⁴ two years later, the twelve-year-old Mozart would compose his first Singspiel, *Bastien und Bastienne*, to the plot and premiere it (at least as tradition has it) in the private garden of Anton Mesmer.⁵ A generation later, Beethoven would make an arrangement of one of the arias for tenor and piano trio.⁶ Indeed, before the century was over, there were performances of *Le devin* in Brussels (1753), Lyons (1754), The Hague (1754), Stockholm (1758 and 1783), Frankfurt (1759), Vienna (1760), Turin (1761), Liège (1771), Warsaw (1778), Hamburg (1782), Gothenburg (1783), Amsterdam (1787), Cologne (1795-1796) and St. Petersburg (1797).⁷

What was it, then, about this opera that “mesmerized” first a monarch, then a continent? The answer involves the meaning of paradox. Rousseau wrote in both early works *Emile*, and *Le devin*: “I would rather be a man of paradoxes than a man of prejudices,” thereby demonstrating that he meant it. It is at once unquestionably simple and wonderfully complex. The story praises artlessness, yet also implies the value, even perhaps the necessity, of “urban smarts.” The opera is celebratory but asserts throughout the emotion of regret. The setting is entirely rural, yet its language is redolent of the court. All of these paradoxes require exploration in order to understand the opera.

With respect to simplicity and complexity, among those who thought the

⁴ For a study of Rousseau’s impact on Burney as musicologist, see my chapter, “The Impact of Rousseau on the Music Histories of Hawkins and Burney,” in the volume *Music’s Intellectual History*. RILM, New York: 2005.

⁵ Stanley Sadie, in his *Mozart: The Early Years, 1756-1781* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 141 has raised doubts concerning the true location of the premiere. Earlier, Alfred Orel raised the same issue in an article in the *Mozart-Jahrbuch* (1962/3): 82-95. The “garden tradition,” however, goes back to Carl von Nissen’s early biography of the composer.

⁶ WoO 158 c/2 #24. Colin’s air “Non, non, Colette n’est point trompeuse.” Beethoven was interested in Rousseau and as early as 1793 had set Rousseau’s “Que le temps me dure.” It is also clear that Beethoven studied at least some of Rousseau’s definitions from his *Dictionnaire de la musique*, as Owen Jander points out in his “Romantic form and content in the slow movement of Beethoven’s Violin Concerto,” *Musical Quarterly* 69 (1983): 159-179.

⁷ There was even a performance in New York in 1790. The source for the performance history of the opera is Alfred Lowenberg, *Annals of Opera: 1587-1940* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1978), 217-218.

simplicity of *Le devin* meritorious was Christoph Willibald von Gluck, who wrote in *Mercure de France*:

L'accent de la nature est la langue universelle: M. Rousseau l'employé aire le plus grand succès dans le genre simple. Son "Devin du village" est un modèle qu'aucun auteur n'a encore imité.[sic]⁸

Gluck plainly meant his words as a compliment. He is also said to have told Salieri: "*Nous aurions fait autrement et nous aurions eu tort.*"⁹ Others, however, demurred and thought the simplicity of Rousseau's opera a sign of a musical amateur in over his head.

That Rousseau, the author of the 1753 *Lettre sur la musique française*¹⁰ and perhaps the greatest advocate of musical simplicity of his generation, would compose in a manner that might eschew complexity, is easy enough to believe. Moreover, we appear to have his own word for it. In *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques*, he asserted that there was nothing in *Le devin* that went "beyond the elementary principles of composition Not only is there no music student who wouldn't be able to do as well after three months, but it's doubtful if any learned composer could resign himself to be so simple."¹¹

So the evidence seems clear – not only the composer, but the persistent commentary of friend and foe alike for two and a half centuries has affirmed that *Le devin* is a *simple*, naïve, straight-forward work. Yet the question arises whether it *is* truly so unidimensional. A close reading makes for a rather different impression. Looked at carefully, a surprising complexity emerges, a richness of ethical and aesthetic implications involving not only its core dramaturgical conception – the oneness of regret and celebration – but also its music.

To begin with the music, again and again it displays a metric irregularity largely uncharacteristic of the general musical procedures of the mid-eighteenth-century. One need go no further than the opening phrase of the Overture to observe this. That phrase is six measures long and is meant to evoke rusticity.

⁸ Cited in H.V.F. Somerset, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau as a Musician," *Music & Letters* 17 (1936): 43, Note 11. The statement was made in 1773.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Written after *Le devin*. It was published in November, 1753.

¹¹ Cited in Leo Damrosch, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Restless Genius* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 226. The *Dialogues* were published in 1780; its writing, however, was begun in 1772.

There are, of course, many six-bar phrases in the music of that time, many of which also partake of the pastoral topos. Yet these are almost invariably organized in a binary manner: either divided into a pattern of 4+2 or, somewhat less frequently, two three-bar units (3+3) in symmetrical balance. For example, the final chorus to Bach's *Peasant Cantata* BWV 212, written some ten years before Rousseau's opera, i.e. in 1742, is designed to convey a vigorous, even slightly uncouth rural world (Example 1).

Example 1. Johann Sebastian Bach, *Peasant Cantata*, Final chorus, mm. 1-6, soprano line only.



Wir gehn nun wo der Tu-del-sack, der Tu-del, Tu-del, Tu-del, Tu-del, Tu-del Tu-del-sack in un-ser Schen-ke brummt.

It is clear that the composer is employing a simple 4+2 design. In contrast, what Rousseau does is more metrically intricate. His six bar phrase is divided into three asymmetrical groupings: 1+3+2 (see Example 2).

Example 2. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Le devin du village*, Overture, mm. 1-6.



Gai
1/11+Ob
va
B

One can hardly argue that Rousseau is the musical “sophisticate,” and Bach, the “naïf.” Yet this comparison ought to alert us to the possibility that more is going on in Rousseau's music than has generally been realized, something far more interesting. In this Overture, Rousseau's unusual approach to metrics is not limited to the irregular six-bar phrase of the opening. In mm. 25-32, these eight bars display a subtle asymmetry: *abbc/ddce*, when analyzed in single-measure units. Moreover, the *d* motive is a transposition of that which dominated the six-bar phrase opening the Overture (see Example 2, mm. 2-4 and Example 3). Yet there it fell metrically in a strikingly different manner. In the opening measures the *d* motive is stated three times in a row; now, just two. The first time it is heard, the motive falls *after* the start of a phrase (on the second measure); now it falls directly at the onset of a four-bar phrase-unit.

Example 3. Rousseau, *Le devin du village*, Overture, mm. 25-32.

When this eight-bar passage returns (once again in the tonic key) to conclude the opening section, its duration is doubled (see Example 4):

Example 4. Rousseau, *Le devin du village*, Overture, mm. 65-80.

The immediate impact is of rustic simplicity. Yet when these sixteen bars are laid out in accordance with the “expected” design of four groups of four-bar phrases, a very engaging, metrically cross-rhythmic pattern emerges:

a b b c / d d d c / b b c d / d d c e.

The core idea in this passage is the presentation of a single, repeating, one-measure motive, followed, as a “refrain,” by the single-measure *c* motive. This idea exists in alternating metric forms: the three-measure pattern *b b c*, and its complement, the four-measure pattern *d d d c*.

Presented twice, the two patterns together yield a 14-measure center, which is surrounded by the non-repeating single-measure motives “a” and “e:”

Example 5. Christoph Willibald von Gluck, *Orfeo ed Euridice*, Act I Scene 2, Air, mm. 156-170.

Andante non presto

Orfeo Chia-mo il mio ben co-si, quan-do si mo-stra il di,
 Vn I/II+Fl 8va
 B
 quan-do s'as-con-de, quan-do s'as-con-de!

Returning directly to *Le devin*, the first aria of the title character, the village soothsayer, is “L’Amour croit” in the second scene. He advises the shepherdess, Colette, to pretend to be having an affair if she wishes to reclaim the affections of her shepherd (Colin):

L’Amour croit, s’il s’inquiète,
 il s’endort, s’il est content.
 La Bergère un peu coquette
 rend le Berger plus constant.

Taken by itself, the poetry is straightforward, polished, and symmetrical: a simple quatrain, rhyming unexceptionally and supported by a “standard” syllabic design (8+7/8 +7), alternating feminine and masculine line endings. The music to this aria, however, is hardly traditional or symmetric. As it opens, it shifts back and forth between five-bar and four-bar phrases – a rhythmic procedure almost unheard of in the early 1750s.¹⁵ Moreover, the music is dramaturgically

¹⁵ In these opening twenty-eight measures, a sophisticated dove-tailing of phrases can also be observed – in which the listener hears a single measure as, at once, the end of one phrase, and the beginning of another; for example, m. 5 and m. 20.

appropriate, since these “teasing” metric structures mirror and actively embody the Soothsayer’s advice to Colette to affect a “sophisticated” manner if she is to regain the enduring affection of her “simple” shepherd.

Example 6. Rousseau, *Le devin du village*, Scene 2 [No. 2] Air, mm. 1-28.

Moderato

L'a-mour croit s'il s'in-qui-
- te, il s'en-dort, s'il est con-tent. L'a-mour croit, s'il s'in-qui-te, il s'en-
dort, s'il est con-tent. L'a-mour croit, s'il s'in-qui-te, il s'en-dort, s'il est con-
tent il s'en-dort, s'il est con-tent, s'il est con-tent:

In his 1955 essay, “Is Beauty the Making One of Opposites,” Eli Siegel asked this question under the heading “Simplicity and Complexity”:

Is there a simplicity in all art, a deep naïveté, an immediate self-containedness, accompanied perhaps by fresh directness or startling economy? – and is there that, so rich, it cannot be summed up; something subterranean and intricate counter-acting and completing simplicity; the teasing complexity of reality meditated on?¹⁶

The music of Rousseau so far investigated in this essay (as well as several further instances soon to be brought forward) illustrates this crucial insight by Eli Siegel – an aspect of his larger idea that the only foundation for a truly universal aesthetics is to be found in strict ontology: in the permanent structure of reality as the oneness of opposites – a structure which precedes, and undergirds, all human cultures. The philosophy he founded in 1941, Aesthetic Realism, reflects that idea in its very name.¹⁷

Looking at Rousseau's work as a whole, a strong case can be made that *all* of it, literary and philosophic, musical and theatrical, was an attempt, on both artistic and ethical grounds, to reconcile the opposites of simplicity and complexity. Throughout his writings, there is a sense of the world itself (and humanity) as at once simple and intricate – immediate in its definiteness, yet so rich, it demands the most subtle thoughts. As J. H. Broome noted in his *Rousseau: A Study of His Thought*, there are two tendencies in Rousseau's writings: "the one active, organizing, social, moral; and expressing the responsibility of Genius; and the other which seeks to break through the barriers of formal convention and return to the passivity of the primitive."¹⁸

The passive and primitive appeals to Rousseau, but, equally, so does the active and the sophisticated – and he is unwilling to state any of this. Broome continues, noting that even in those passages in his prose inveighing against the complexity of contemporary art:

¹⁶ *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 14 (1955): 282-283.

¹⁷ See Edward Green, "A Note on Two Conceptions of Aesthetic Realism," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 45 (2005): 438-440; idem., "Donald Francis Tovey, Aesthetic Realism, and the Need for a Philosophic Musicology," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 36 (2005): 227-248, and a presentation co-authored with Arnold Perey for the April 2004 ESCOM Conference entitled "Aesthetic Realism: A New Foundation for Interdisciplinary Musicology," available on line at the following: <http://www.perey-anthropology.net/worldmusic/escom1.htm>.

¹⁸ J. H. Broome, *Rousseau: A Study of His Thought* (London: Edward Arnold, 1963), 206.

The literary technique, with its subtleties of rhythm, alliteration, assonances and so on, is as refined or evolved as anything in Rousseau. For this reason, it becomes possible to assert that what we have here is not simply the renunciation of art, but the last use by Genius of the most refined techniques of art to communicate the most primitive kind of *volupté*.¹⁹

What Rousseau is truly after, Broome asserts, is a “synthesis of the sensations of the primitive and the sensibility of the Genius.”²⁰ This, moreover, is in keeping with a general tendency he observes in Rousseau – the “offering to the world [of] a philosophy of integration and reconciliation.”²¹ In the final pages of his book, he reminds his readers of Rousseau’s “repeated claims to be following the middle course between the extremes of intolerant dogmatism,” and continues: “This suggests that he was trying courageously to do what somebody has to do in every age: namely, to work out for his own times a practical and acceptable synthesis.”²²

Tellingly, one of the earliest reviews of *Le devin du village* indicates that the oneness of simplicity and complexity, of art and artlessness, was noticed right away. In *Mercur*e (April 1753), the critic notes (with some class snobbery plainly on exhibition in his prose): “the multitude find the melodies of this *intermède* very agreeable, and discerning people noticed in addition that the music possessed a finesse, truth and naïveté of expression that are very rare.”²³ In the opinion of the present author to have both finesse and “naïveté” at once, and to use them on behalf of truth, is an achievement in any century.

Continuing with the investigation of the technical drama of simplicity and complexity in the music of *Le devin*, the aria “Je vais revoir ma charmante maîtresse,” sung by the shepherd Colin in Scene 5, needs to be examined. The Soothsayer has just encouraged Colin to break off his affair with a rich woman from the city and return to Colette – to return to his simple life and forsake the false intricacies of high society. Yet, in a marvelous and significant paradox, the

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 207.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

²² *Ibid.*, 211.

²³ I am using the translation provided by Daniel Hertz, “The beginnings of the operatic romance: Rousseau, Sedaine, and Monsigny.” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 15 (1981-1982): 161.

aria expressing his regret and his longing to see Colette is one of the most complex of mid-eighteenth-century French music. More precisely, it is at once possessed of an immediate and abiding simplicity which, in keeping with Eli Siegel's principle of Aesthetic Realism, is "counteracted and completed" by an authentic and equally omnipresent intricacy.

With the exception of an identity between m. 7 and m. 31, there is no musical repetition at all in the opening thirty-three measures of this forty-one-bar aria.²⁴ Each of these measures has a different bass line, melody, or harmonic figuration. Even the single identity mentioned earlier is not experienced as an identity; not only are the words different, but m. 7 is part of a phrase leading to a cadence on the tonic (G minor; m. 9), while m. 31 leads to half-cadence on the dominant (m. 33). The only true repetition in the aria (i.e., not one of those necessitated by the repeats of sections, which the conventions of eighteenth-century binary form required) comes at the very end as Rousseau repeats the final two lines of his text in order to signal closure:

Je vous verrai renaître encore,
doux moments que j'ai perdus.

Yet even here, the desire to honor complexity remains in play; only the first line is set identically (mm. 26-29 = mm. 34-37).²⁵ The final line is a new melody, with a new figured bass not yet heard in the aria. There is also a boldly dissonant orchestral cross relation (F and F#) on the seemingly "simple" word *doux* – implying that we'd be wise not to "sum up" the love-story. The drama between Colin and Colette, Rousseau deftly implies, has yet fully to play itself out (Example 7).

In the next scene, Colette confronts Colin. They are reconciled, yet not until she has had some choice words, including: "Vos soins sont superflus/non, Colin, je ne t'aime plus." At this point, rather understandably, Colin sings a short aria of despair, "Ta foi ne m'est point ravie." This aria, too, has a musical structure which is a compound of "immediate self-containedness" and something "teasingly complex."

²⁴ Another subtlety: while the aria proper is designed in unwavering four-bar units, the opening orchestral phrase is five-measures long.

²⁵ Except for an inconsequential variation on the final quarter note of the bass line: B♭ rather than G.

Example 7. Rousseau, *Le devin du village*, Scene 5 [No. 1] Air, mm. 26-41.

Colin

Je vous ver - rai re - nai - tre en - co - re, doux mo - ments que j'ai per - du.

Je vous ver - rai re - nai - tre en - co - re, doux mo - ments que j'ai per - dus

A single quatrain in heptasyllabic lines comprises the text to this binary-form aria:

- (I) Ta foi ne m'est point ravie,
non, consulte mieux ton cœur.
- (II) Toi-même en m'ôtant la vie,
tu perdras tout ton bonheur.

What differentiates the first part structurally from the second is that in the later section the text is set twice, and as the words are repeated Rousseau daringly gives them a melody that largely reverses the prosodic accents found in his earlier presentation of those same words. In m. 10, “Toi-même” is set short/long, and with a rising melodic motion; in mm.18, long/short, and with a falling motion. In m. 12 “-tant la” is set short/long and rising, and in m. 20, it falls; and taking the two-note melisma into consideration – (“-tant”) – its prosody is likewise reversed, being now long/short. Measure 24 is likewise a reversal of m. 16, yet now only the prosody is reversed, for the melody in both cases descends. Moreover, where in the earlier cases we had a short/long prosody reversed into a long/short, here the earlier design was long/short, and the reversal short/long (Example 8).

Example 8. Rousseau, *Le devin du village*, Scene 6 Aria, mm. 1-25.

The musical score is presented in three systems. Each system includes a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/8. The lyrics are written below the vocal line. The first system ends with a first ending bracket labeled '1.' and a trill ornament. The second system begins with a second ending bracket labeled '2.' and also features a trill ornament. The third system concludes with a final trill ornament. The piano accompaniment provides a steady rhythmic and harmonic support for the vocal line.

Complex, indeed, but how simple, how “natural,” it all sounds to the ear. Rousseau is asserting the equal reality of two opposite values through the symbolic language of music. He proceeds on the artistic (and ethical) assumption that we need to honor both.

Might this be the true message of *Le devin*, and account for the enormous appeal it had in the eighteenth century – and can still have? That is the contention of this essay. Rousseau is known as the champion of simplicity and the “return to nature,” but he is also a subtle stylist, full of “art.” He loves simplicity with a passion, but uses his mind with enormous sophistication. As Peter Gay notes, this was the view of Rousseau that was held by both Kant and, later, Cassirer. As they saw it: “Rousseau wanted man to return to his true nature, which was not a simian primitivism, but a genuine cultivation of his

highest capacities.”²⁶ It is in this light that we need to see Rousseau’s urging of a “return to nature.” Who would say that “nature” is only simplicity? Not Rousseau, for he wrote in his *Dialogues*: “L’homme de la nature éclairé par la raison a des appétits plus délicats mais non moins simples que dans sa première grossièreté.” Thus, the nature to which he calls humanity to return is not a mythical state of mindless simplicity, but a world in which a reasoned simplicity is at one with rich and subtle sensations. When he asks his contemporaries (and us) to forsake the false complexities of corrupt society, is he therefore turning his back on the sincere and authentic complexities of mind and reality? Hardly; and once again the words of Eli Siegel shed invaluable light on the matter. “The resolution of conflict in self is like the making one of opposites in art.”²⁷ Rousseau aims to alleviate human conflict, but by means that are, as Siegel explains, fundamentally aesthetic.²⁸

As Scene 6 ends, the conflict at the core of the plot is resolved. It is clear that Colin will return to Colette, and that she will accept his repentance. Rousseau thus opens Scene 7 with a duo recitative in which the shepherd asks how he can repay the Soothsayer. He is answered “Je suis assez payé, si vous êtes heureux.” Having said this noble thing, he then launches into “Venez, jeunes garçons” – an air (once more in binary form) which Rousseau shapes in the very daring balance of 8+11 bars.

This semi-precarious “balance,” the like of which is hard to find in any other short aria of the mid-eighteenth century, conveys the impression that the Soothsayer is almost giddy with happiness at his success. He calls upon all the young people of the village to learn from Colin and Colette – “venez les imiter... venez, en chantant leur bonheur” – and we witness again the paradox that music of such simplicity and immediate impact should have, as well as such underlying unpredictability. Constantly implying repetition, it actually does so only once: m. 9 = m. 11. Measure 13 and measure 14, for example, have the

²⁶ Found in Gay’s editorial introduction to Ernst Cassirer, *Rousseau, Kant and Goethe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), xii.

²⁷ Cited in Martha Baird, *Two Aesthetic Realism Papers* (New York: Definition Press, 1971), vi.

²⁸ To understand a great philosopher, it is useful to employ the thought of another great philosopher. The same might be said about literary greatness. Rousseau and Siegel have in common this important (and rare) fact, that each was great in both fields. It would be difficult to find a greater example than Rousseau for the eighteenth century, or Siegel for the twentieth.

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same melody, yet different bass lines, and different orchestral figurations for the violins (Example 9).

Example 9. Rousseau, *Le devin du village*, Scene 7 Air, mm. 1-19.

Ve - nez jeu - nes gar - cons, ve - nez, ai - ma - bles fil - les. Ra - sam - blez vous, ra - sem - blez
 vous, ra - sem - ble vous, ve - nez les i - mi - ter. Ve - nez ga - lants Ber - gers, ve -
 nez beau - te gen - ti - les, ve - nez, en chan - tant leur bon -
 heur, ap - pren - dre le gou - ter, ap - pren - dre le gou - ter.

It would seem that enough evidence has been brought forward to show that, from a musical point of view, it is an error to judge *Le devin du village* merely as a “simple” work. Simplicity is certainly there; it is, to use the current term, “foregrounded.” But just as certainly one can sense the presence of the richly

intricate. Rousseau's music is straight-forward *and* subtle; symmetrical *and* askew.

Why then have so many critics missed this fact? One large reason, of course, is Rousseau's reputation as an advocate of human simplicity. Another is the inveterate prejudice of "professionals" against "amateurs" – for Rousseau did devote the major efforts of his intellect and creative energy towards literature and philosophy rather than musical composition.

Nevertheless, he wrote substantially about music; one need only think of the several hundred entries on music he contributed to the *Encyclopédie* and his own two-volume *Dictionnaire de musique*.²⁹ Nor was his compositional output inconsequential. Along with *Le devin*, there was also his early opéra-ballet *Les muses galantes* (1745), as well as a late opera *Daphnis et Chloé* (1774-1779), which, while left incomplete, was substantial enough to be recently reconstructed and performed.³⁰ There appear to have been, in addition, two early *tragédies lyriques*, *Iphis et Anaxarètes* (ca 1740) and *La découverte du nouveau monde* (1741). The music to these, unfortunately, has been lost. There were also shorter vocal and instrumental works. In 1781, three years after this death, a volume, *Les Consolations des Misères de ma Vie, ou Recueil d'Airs, Romances et Duos de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* appeared containing some one hundred songs he had composed. While he did not compose the music but only the text for *Pygmalion*, the *scène lyrique* from 1770 – his friend Horace Coignet did the score – this work is now universally recognized as the source of all later melodramas. He may have been an "amateur," but, if so, he was a productive one, whose output left a clearer mark on the future course of music in Europe than that of many a "professional."

A deeper reason, then, for the undervaluing of Rousseau the musician should be sought. It involves taking seriously a fundamental frailty in the human mind – one which, in the field of art criticism, can render a person incompetent to judge truly: the inability to see the simultaneity of opposites. Since this is the heart of Rousseau's achievement, the critical debility mentioned above is obvious. Eli Siegel explains in *Self and World: An Explanation of Aesthetic Realism*:

²⁹ A complete list of the musical articles Rousseau contributed to the *Encyclopédie* can be found in Alfred Richard Oliver, *The Encyclopedists as Critics of Music* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947), 171-188 (Appendix A).

³⁰ Willy Merz did the reconstitution and conducted the 2003 "premiere" at the Festival internazionale di Sarre in Aosta, Italy.

One of the most necessary alterations of the present day human mind, is the changing of the feeling that opposites have to fight, that they can't exist as one. Many, many people seeing opposing drives in their minds, feel they have to choose one or the other; and curse the one they don't choose. This is deeply foolish, but it goes on in every State of the Union, and elsewhere.

Aesthetics is not foolish in this way. It points to glorious good sense. It points to an exciting friendship of different ways of mind.³¹

He then continues with a statement that goes to the heart of the trouble commentators have had with Rousseau – both in grasping the value of his musical work and his life's work as a whole:

The self has in it the drive towards simplicity, for it must be one. It has in it the drive towards multiplicity, for the world is various, and the self grows by meeting more and more and arranging this more and more . . .

These possibilities of self are both to be met. So what are we going to do? Be simple in the summer and complicated in the fall; avoid intricacy in the morning and welcome spiritual adventure in the afternoon? This won't work. People have tried it and come to dislike themselves for their pains. The metaphysical and aesthetic obligation faces us of being simple and intricate at the same moment, in the same hour, in the same day, in the same life.³²

In the estimation of this author, the chief value of *Le devin du village* lies in the sincere and often deft manner with which, in it, the intricacy of the mind and its urge for simplicity are manifested together. Some critics likely missed this, because, based upon their own life experience, they were not sure that such a confluence was even possible. This is all the more reason that Rousseau is worthy of study, in this author's opinion.

Perhaps the single most famous instance of music from *Le devin* is Colin's "Dans ma cabane obscure," sung in the middle of the opera's long final scene.³³ This "Romance" occurs right before a pantomime that is enacted by the villagers: one that presents a thinly-veiled reference to the drama of seduction

³¹ Eli Siegel. *Self and World: An Explanation of Aesthetic Realism* (New York: Definition Press, 1981), 107. The chapter, "The Aesthetic Method in Self-Conflict," was written in the early 1940s.

³² *Ibid.*, 121.

³³ Scene 8, incidentally, lasts as long as all of the preceding scenes put together.

and redemption played out in earlier scenes.

From a traditional dramaturgical point of view, all of this smacks of absurdity. Hasn't Colin made clear the sincerity of his renewed love for Colette, as well as his regret of ever having strayed from her? In fact, regret is his "theme" from start to finish. His first words in the opera, heard in the recitative in Scene 4, are:

L'amour et vos leçons m'ont enfin rendu sage,
je préfère Colette à des biens superflus:
Je sais lui plaire en habit de village;
sous un habit doré qu'obtiendrais-je de plus?

His last, found in the fifth stanza of the Scene 8 Vaudeville, are:

A voltiger de belle en belle
on perd souvent l'heureux instant,
Souvent un Berger trop fidèle
est moins aimé qu'un inconstant.³⁴

There is one more line of poetry to which Colin gives solo voice: a single line from the sixth stanza of this same Vaudeville.³⁵ It is one that Colette finds difficult to read – they are singing from a text written by the Soothsayer, who presents the opening stanza himself – a Colin “helps her to decipher it,” according to the stage directions given by Rousseau. This line that is so hard for her to read is: “Par les rigueurs on le rebutte,” which appears within the following context within the stanza:

A son caprice on est en butte,
il veut les ris, il veut les pleurs:
Par les rigueurs on le rebutte;
on l'affaiblit par les faveurs.

This is her stanza, yet the line which expresses the vigor of regret, and the desire

³⁴ Adding to the impact of his entrance in Scene 4 is the startling contrast between the key of Colin's recitative (C minor) and the key (A minor) which concluded the Soothsayer's recitative – a recitative which comprised all of Scene 3 and was only eight bars long.

³⁵ The metrics of the Vaudeville are also impressively asymmetrical. Its stanzas follow the phrase structure of 3+5+5+6+6+4+4 measures.

to act boldly and proudly upon its urging, is his – and in it the inconsistency, the caprice of love, is both rebuked and sent flying.

If, then, Colin is such a constant, energetic critic of himself, why should the villagers rub it in through the pantomime, particularly in such a public manner? Why, for that matter, should the Soothsayer go to all the trouble in setting up a confrontation with Colette, when it is clear from the recitative that he sings immediately before Colin's first entrance that he already knew the true state of Colin's affections? It does seem unsporting and excessive, especially in the light of the fact that these same villagers had, at the Soothsayer's urging, just sung a chorus celebrating the love of Colin and Colette, acknowledging his redemption. As if this were not enough, they then follow their chorus with a Pastorelle; a communal dance in the second half of which (marked "Gai" in a rapid 6/8) they give a bouquet to Colette, who then gives in to Colin.

It would seem that joy is everywhere, that all has been forgiven, resolved. Then what is going on in Rousseau's mind? Why did he feel impelled at this point, the emotional climax, to take the story "backwards?" Even a person as sympathetic as Charles Burney was mystified, and as he reshaped the opera for the London stage, he cut this scene without mercy. In the preface of the second edition of the libretto for *The Cunning Man*, he wrote:

Upon rehearsing the Music, it has been thought necessary to retrench the Second Act, for fear of satiety: for though the Airs and Dances, after the reconciliation of Colin and Phoebe [e.g. Colette], are by no means inferior to the rest in point of composition; yet, as no other business remained to be done after that circumstance but that of mere festivity, the Editor, with some reluctance, submitted to the omission of such Airs, etc.³⁶

The answer to this theatrical conundrum, to the "oddness" of Rousseau's dramaturgy, can be found in the fact that, perhaps more than any person before him with the possible exception of St. Augustine, Rousseau is the philosopher of regret – of proud and public regret. His *Confessions* were written for that purpose, as were his late *Dialogues* in which he sets "Rousseau" as the "Judge

³⁶ *The Cunning Man* (London: T. Becket and P. A. de Hondt, 1760), ii. Although Rousseau's original is in one act, Burney reworked it as a two-act opera, adding some additional music to conclude its opening act.

of Jean-Jacques.”³⁷ He wrote: “I am slave through my vices and free through my remorse.”³⁸ Moreover, in *Emile* there is also the following passionate statement:

Conscience, conscience! Divine instinct, immortal and celestial voice, certain guide of a being that is ignorant and limited but intelligent and free; infallible judge of good and bad which makes man like unto God; it is you who make the excellence of his nature and the morality of his actions. Without you I sense nothing in me that raises me above the beasts, other than the sad privilege of leading myself astray from error to error with the aid of an understanding without rule and a reason without principle.³⁹

Broome writes in his study of the philosopher: “There is . . . no doubt that confession is not only a personal need for Rousseau, but is also a vitally important idea in his system as a whole.”⁴⁰ He continues by giving an example that is clearly paralleled in *Le Devin*, or rather, presaged there, since the opera is eight years earlier than the novel being referenced:

The best evidence of this [need for confession] is provided by *La nouvelle Héloïse*, where it is a recurring theme and where the New Order symbolized by the marriage of Julie and the society of Clarens cannot, as it were, be ratified until there has taken place a general clearing of consciences, in which Julie confesses to Wolmar her earlier relationship with Saint-Preux, and Wolmar confesses in turn that he has known all about it.⁴¹

³⁷ As N. J. H. Dent notes about the *Confessions* in *A Rousseau Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 56: “Few people have attempted to do what Rousseau did with quite the same candour, and those few have scarcely succeeded as well as he.”

³⁸ Cited in Cassirer, *op. cit.*, 47.

³⁹ Translated by Allan Bloom, cited in Dent, *op. cit.*, 62.

⁴⁰ Broome, *op. cit.*, 152.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* There are other elements in later Rousseau which are already present in this early opera. For example, the Tutor in *Emile* is hinted at in the character of the Soothsayer, as is the Lawgiver in *Du contrat social*. Of all of Rousseau’s important works, only the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* of 1750 preceded *Le Devin du village*. The conclusion of the opera, with its public celebration mingling song and dance, also predates the famous passage from his 1755 *Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité*, in which he writes how in a society free from social injustice, “singing and dancing, the true children of love and leisure, become the amusement, or rather the

Confession, Broome asserts, is for Rousseau “a corollary of the Social Contract, and the way to both the recovery of personal contentment and the realization of the General Will in the new society.”⁴²

Colin’s words in “Dans ma cabane obscure” imply that honest regret is a key element in human happiness and should be proudly welcomed; when it is, the difficulties that inevitably are part of life can be borne much more easily. Colin, looking forward to life with Colette, sees her as adding to his joy and peace, but is clear he does not expect “vent, soleil, froidure . . . travaux” to be miraculously absent just because she is with him. What he does imagine is that her presence will enable him to meet these difficulties with a new feeling of self-respect – something he could not do when he was chasing a false notion of love:

Dans ma cabane obscure toujours soucis nouveaux:
vent, soleil, ou froidure, toujours peine et travaux.

Des champs de la prairie en retournant chaque soir,
chaque soir plus chérie, je viendrai te revoir.

Colette, ma Bergère, si tu viens l’habiter,
Colin dans sa chaumière n’a rien à regretter.

Du soleil dans nos plaines devançant le retour,
je charmerai mes peines en chantant notre amour.

We are not in a position to understand Rousseau’s dramaturgy; why Scene 8 is such a prolonged mingling of regret and celebration.⁴³ For Rousseau,

occupation of men and women brought together in idleness.” Translation in Broome, *op. cit.*, 185.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 152-153.

⁴³ From a tonal point of view, the opera’s opening and conclusion are clearly contrasted. The Overture and the first two scenes focus on the interplay of two tonal centers, D and F. Scene 8, by way of contrast, is overwhelmingly dominated by the key of G (major and minor), which first appears in Scene 5. One could suggest that the lingering of a single tonality with its two parallel modes was a mirror of Rousseau’s desire to linger with the mingling of regret and joy that constitutes the final lengthy scene. The more rapid changes of tonality before this point indicate that the drama has not entirely worked itself out; the near “monotonicity” of the final scene is where all is ethically, dramaturgically, and tonally resolved.

these two concepts are inseparable. Regret, truly and publically expressed, was seen by him as the cause of an inevitable increase of honest self-respect. As Colin asserts in his Romance, that there is no need to avoid the reality of pain and regretful memory, why shouldn't the villagers agree with him? Does not their pantomime continue his logic? It is, moreover, a logic that is rock solid, for the attempt to avoid regret is a guarantee of having more of it – thus the initial regret is compounded with the shame of not having the strength of character to acknowledge it.

What people most often do not do is to see their regret as a source of increased energy and happiness; to welcome it proudly (as Colin does, and therein lies his wisdom). Eli Siegel once observed: "If a mistake is not a stepping stone, it *is* a mistake." Further, in "An Outline of Aesthetic Realism," he wrote under the heading "The Past Can Be Seen Better":

The past is what it is, but it can always be seen better. The past, seen better, can reasonably be regarded as changing. If we see what has happened to us better today, we give the past a more promising future. There is no limit to how well we can see anything in the past. This means the past can join the present and future, wisely.⁴⁴

Colin and Rousseau agree, and so does Colette, who, later in this celebratory scene, also has a "summation" aria expressing what she has learned about love:

Avec l'objet de mes amours
rien ne m'afflige tour m'enchante;
Sans cesse il rit, toujours je chante,
c'est une chaîne d'heureux jours.

Her words are certainly cheerful, but her music is the most darkly minor in the entire score. For example, in the concluding measures one finds the most complex and dissonant chromaticism in the entire opera (Example 10). Rousseau, it seems, is determined to keep pleasure and pain, regret and joy, close in our minds; and, if possible, to have them inseparable. He is determined to do so for our happiness.

⁴⁴ Cited in *The New York Times* (16 August 1976). The Soothsayer's final words in his concluding Vaudeville are that love is "un enfant." One implication of that metaphor is that love has the freshness of infancy. The love in this story which emerges from (and never forgets) its regretful past thus embodies Siegel's observation: through the image of the child, we see the "more promising future."

Example 10. Rousseau, *Le devin du village*, Scene 8 Finale, mm. 107-123.

sans cesse il rit, tou-jours je chan-te c'est u-ne cha-ne d'heu-reux jours,

sans cesse il rit, tou-jours je chan-te, c'est u-ne cha-ne d'heu-reux

jours.

Since it is the most celebrated piece of music in the opera, Colin's Romance deserves its own close reading. The focus, once again, is on the opposites of simplicity and complexity. Like regret and joy, these are two other values which Rousseau did not want to be severed, either in art or in life.

The melody proclaims the value of simplicity. Entirely diatonic, it is cast throughout in unwavering three-bar phrases; even the orchestral introduction is only three measures long. The overall rhythmic character would have been a familiar one; as Daniel Hertz points out, it is a "branle de Poitou."⁴⁵ Moreover, the prosody of the text is highly symmetric, as well, and likewise seems to assert simplicity. This is further asserted by the many internal musical repetitions that can be heard in the aria, not only in its melody, but also in the bass line and its harmonic figurations (Example 11).

⁴⁵ Hertz, *op. cit.*, 160.

Example 11. Rousseau, *Le devin du village*, Scene 8 Romance.

Dans ma ca - bane ob - scu - re tou - jours sou -
Des champs de la pra - ri - e re - tour - nant

cis nou - veaux; vent, so - leil, ou froi - du - re, tou - jours peine et tra - -
cha - que soir; cha - que soir plus che - ri - e, je viendrai te re -

vaux. Co - aet - te, ma - Ber - ge - re, si tu viens l'ha - bi - ter.
voir. Du so - leil dans nos plai - nes de - ven - ant le re - tour.

Co - lin dans sa cha - - mi - re n'a rien re - gret - ter.
je char - me - rai mes pei - nes en chan - tant notre a - mour.

Where, then, is the complexity? One aspect of it can be found in the way Rousseau cunningly distributes his poetic syllables. For example, one should consider mm. 4-9, which are the opening bars of the vocal melody and the model for the phrase that immediately follows. Here the six-bar phrase is comprised of two three-bar subunits, as the pattern of syllables per measure demonstrates:

Unit I: 2 / 3 / 2
Unit II: 3 / 2 / 1

This syllabic design is a subtle cross-rhythm within the music design. The musical pattern is three bars twice. The syllabic pattern implies two-bar units arranged 2/3||2/3 with a surprise at the end (2/1).

There is still another aspect to the cross-rhythm, one which emerges through an analysis of the melody. It is organized in short phrases, each of which begins with a high tonic D. In the first six bars, there are four such units with the following durations: 4 beats, 2 beats, 3 beats, and 9 beats. Moreover, if “contour theory” is applied to the final nine-beat phrase, it becomes two separate phrases with an asymmetry of 4+5 beats.

The second half of the aria (mm. 16-27) admittedly has a different syllabic design:

Unit I: 3 / 2 / 2
Unit II: 3 / 2 / 1

The surprise here is achieved, paradoxically enough, through the lack of surprise, as the phrases of the syllabic units nearly parallel or echo each other. From a melodic point of view, however, this second half is far more adventurous. Where the first half restricted itself in two decisive ways – to a range of a mere perfect fourth and to a single basic melodic gesture – this half cannot be so easily described. Its motions are far more unexpected.

The most important way, however, that Rousseau presents richness within simplicity in the aria is through the unexpected manner in which chromaticism is employed. First of all, these tones all appear cunningly in the orchestral accompaniment, thus “roughening up” the otherwise pure diatonic texture of the melody without interfering with its purity. The most intense chromatic D# occurs in the bass line in the second measure of the orchestral introduction; other than this, there is no chromaticism in the first half of the aria. By contrast, a G# is heard three times (mm. 17, 23, and 26) in the second half – the last time in conjunction with an F#.

The two most surprising moments in this piece, therefore, are placed in a completely symmetrical manner: the D# diminished chord appearing in the second bar and the G# diminished seventh in the penultimate measure. This is pure aesthetics: the oneness of surprise and symmetry, something that has been noted several times before with respect to Rousseau’s compositional procedures.

Returning to the opposites of pleasure and pain, regret and hope, so crucial to the central ethical and dramaturgical purpose of this work, there is a technical point to mention before taking leave of the Romance: opposites are made one as painful words get pleasurable harmonization and pleasurable words a more troubled setting. The opening verses tell of the pain and troubles of life, yet as

Colin sings them, the orchestra supports him in complete diatonic purity; the concluding verses, on the contrary, tell of overcoming the pain through love, yet they are harmonized with several non-diatonic tones, culminating in that G# diminished seventh.

With this being said, it is time now to turn to the third of the paradoxes that are central to *Le devin* and its artistic power. Despite its reputation as a work that celebrates the victory of the rural over the urban, it is more profitable (and more accurate) to see it as a surprising attempt to join these two ways of meeting life. While Rousseau is popularly seen as having brought the rural and the urban to their greatest point of combat through a supposed championing of “natural” man over “cultured” man, the opera actually offers a truce in that battle, even a *détente*. Technically, Rousseau achieves this by bringing to its Arcadian setting a “courtly” use of the French language; and to its rustic songs, the rhythms of the court dance.

Related to this last paradox is Rousseau’s transformation, through his libretto, of the pastoral from a mythological and picturesque genre into one with distinct (and radical) political implications. He was the first to transform the eighteenth-century musical pastoral from a picturesque genre distant from life into one with immediate social and psychological import.

French theater had pastoral drama as early as the 1580s. James Anthony, author of the classic text *French Baroque Music*, writes: “The cult of the shepherd and shepherdess . . . remained a fixed staple of the French lyric stage throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.”⁴⁶ This was different from Italian opera, which around 1700 turned decisively away from the pastoral in favor of grandly epic and mythological topics; moreover, it was also poised to explore “up-to-date domestic comedy” through the creation of the opera buffa.⁴⁷

One characteristic of the French dramatic pastoral was the presence of a wizard in the midst of the quiet countryside: *Le devin* has one in the title character.⁴⁸ Yet his magic consists not of incantations and potions, such as one might find in popular genres such as the Harry Potter series, but rather of practical “love advice.” The Soothsayer is a very knowing, earthly wizard, as witness the advice he gives Colette: to act “urban,” to pretend to have an affair, and to use

⁴⁶ James Anthony, *French Baroque Music* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981), 62. Anthony devotes his entire Chapter 6 to the origins and evolution of the genre.

⁴⁷ See Donald J. Grout, *A Short History of Opera* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 121.

⁴⁸ Anthony, *op. cit.*, 62.

Colin's jealousy to break the "charm" that binds him to the "upper crust" city woman.

As a means of seeing the true nature of Rousseau's attitude towards the rural, it is useful to contrast the music of *Le devin* with that of its most famous "derivative," Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Bastien und Bastienne*, KV 50.

This author is not aware of any hard evidence that the young twelve-year-old Mozart knew Rousseau's music, yet both he and his father kept up with the times and were in Paris in 1763, 1764, and 1760, years in which Rousseau's opera was quite popular. Mozart may indeed not have known any of the music, but he was perhaps indirectly affected; he had heard much of Gluck, for example, as well as other composers of the *opéra comique*. One searches the earlier music by the young Mozart in vain, however, for anything quite like that which concludes his 1768 version. Its "Devin" is named Colas, and he too seems enamored of asymmetrical phrase structures. In the final trio, "Kinder, Kinder," one hears irregular alternations of four and three bar phrases (Example 12).

Example 12. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Bastien und Bastienne*, KV 50, No. 16, mm. 1-7.

The image shows a musical score for the first seven measures of the piece 'Kinder, Kinder' from Mozart's *Bastien und Bastienne*, KV 50. The score is written for voice and piano. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 2/4. The vocal line is in the bass clef, and the piano accompaniment is in the treble and bass clefs. The lyrics are: 'Kin - der, Kin - der, seht nach Sturm und Regen wird ein schoe-ner Tag ge - bracht,'. The piano part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a forte (f) dynamic marking.

If there is a parallel here between Rousseau and Mozart, one must also consider the following contrast, which is highly instructive if one wishes to grasp the true attitude of Rousseau towards the rural. Nowhere in *Le devin* is there anything like Mozart's harshly modal evocation of authentic country life, as epitomized in the bagpipe of Colas (Example 13a). Compared with this, Rousseau's music as his villagers enter appears quite tame (Example 13b). It is vigorous, to be sure, but so refined, so formal – so "free from dirt." It bears, in fact, a clear kinship with the melody of a popular court dance in the same key (G major) composed thirty-seven years earlier entitled *La fanatique* (Example 14).

Example 13. a) Mozart, *Bastien und Bastienne*, No. 3, mm. 1-13;
 b) Rousseau, *Le devin du village*, Scene 8, mm. 1-8.

a)

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The first system, for Mozart's *Bastien und Bastienne*, consists of four staves: a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/8 time signature, and three piano accompaniment staves (treble, alto, and bass clefs). The second system, for Rousseau's *Le devin du village*, also consists of four staves: a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/8 time signature, and three piano accompaniment staves (treble, alto, and bass clefs). The piano parts in both systems feature rhythmic patterns of eighth and sixteenth notes.

b)

The image displays a single system of musical notation for Rousseau's *Le devin du village*. It consists of three staves: a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/2 time signature, and two piano accompaniment staves (treble and bass clefs). The word "Gai" is written above the first measure of the vocal line. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note rhythm.

It is with this in mind that one should consider the aria which opens *Le devin*, Colette's "J'ai perdu tout mon bonheur." She is a shepherdess bewailing the loss of her shepherd, but her music and the lyrics have a courtly pedigree. Musically, her aria is a slow gavotte, akin in rhythm to André Campra's "du paysant," composed for his 1697 opéra-ballet *L'Europe galante*: a work in which each nation is characterized by a certain musical genre. James Anthony writes:

“It is not by accident that Campra chose a pastorale to represent ‘La France’.”⁴⁹

Example 14. Raoul-Auger Feuillet, *La fanatique*, incipit.⁵⁰



of opposites is what we are going after in ourselves.” In *Self and World* he writes further:

The word *beauty*, even today, has a delicate, frail ring to it. If you talk about beauty, you are regarded by many as not being tough-minded. This should stop. Beauty has to be seen as complete logic, good sense carried further than usual: resplendent sanity.⁵³

In *Le devin*, Rousseau found a way to resolve conflicts he and his contemporaries otherwise found largely intractable. The most important of these has already been discussed, but there are others. For example, the work was pioneering in its blend of French and Italian musical elements, something quite bold at a time when the two schools were violently pitted against each other.⁵⁴ Paradoxically, Rousseau the essayist helped to inflame the “take no prisoners” mood of the controversy. When the quarrel is studied, it is clear that underlying its nationalistic aspect was a deeper aesthetic debate concerning passion and logic, the present and the past, and – on a very technical level – the fight between melody in its immediacy and harmony with its ruminatory depth.⁵⁵

Here one sees what Rousseau was really after as he felt impelled to join French and Italian musical styles, as well as, paradoxically, to fulminate against French music in his famous polemic of 1753, *Lettre sur la musique française*. Partisans are always tempted in the heat of battle to overstate their case, for, they believe, there is a dangerous enemy who must be defeated at all costs. Rousseau felt Italian music had a verve, a spontaneity, a naturalness lacking in the French music of his time. While he wrote in a partisan manner, however, it is clear that, from his musical practice, he saw value in both traditions and wanted them conjoined. An example of this can be found in the duet “A jamais Colin t’engage” from Scene 6 (Example 15).

⁵³ Siegel, *Self and World*, *op. cit.*, 112. The statement is from a chapter entitled “The Aesthetic Method in Self-Conflict,” which was written in the early 1940s.

⁵⁴ Among those who have drawn attention to the confluence of French and Italian elements in the work are Daniel Hertz and Jacqueline Waerber.

⁵⁵ There was also a battle between the word, in its distinctness and concreteness, and music with its greater abstraction. In light of this, it should not be forgotten how surprising it was in the age of Metastasio for composer and librettist to be one and the same person, which is exactly the situation with *Le devin*. If not a “paradox,” this at least was a novelty; this still very far from the age of Wagner.

Example 15. Rousseau, *Le devin du village*, Scene 6, mm. 1-34.

The musical score consists of five systems. The first system shows the piano introduction in 3/8 time, starting with a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The piano part includes a dynamic marking of *mf* and several trills. The second system continues the piano introduction. The third system shows the piano introduction continuing, with trills in the right hand. The fourth system introduces the vocal part for Colin, with the lyrics "A ja - mais Co - lin t'en - ga - ge son coeu-et sa foi, son coeu-et sa foi,". The fifth system shows the piano accompaniment for the vocal part, including trills in the right hand.

The rhythm is typically French, yet the orchestral introduction is filled with pastoral tropes of clear Italian origin: prominent parallel thirds, as well as the use of the flattened seventh over a tonic harmony. This intermingling of national styles, while not completely original with Rousseau, was nevertheless rare. Nor is this duet atypical of the stylistic procedure of his opera; only one number earlier is another duet, “Tant qu’a mon Colin,” in which Colette and Colin work out their doubts about each other, and as they do, we hear French formality in the rhythm and Italian warmth in the harmony (Example 16).

We can thus use the music of *Le devin* to get beneath Rousseau’s polemics (which are colorful, striking, and wonderfully well-written) to see his true feelings, which these polemics tend to disguise. He was a passionate critic of artifice when it got in the way of sincerity. That is why he felt impelled to invent the myth that, in nature, man was uncorrupted. Nevertheless, he also knew that society was important and that the artificial, the man-made, could be a good, necessary, and even beautiful thing. If his earlier philosophical writings had tended to assert the opposite position, his 1762 *Du contrat social* states

quite forthrightly that political freedom – the freedom that comes from living justly within society – was more authentic than the freedom of unhampered nature. Paul Strathern notes:

Now he stresses how natural human beings are not so free after all. Society gives natural human beings a liberty from their enslaving natural passions, as well as a moral equality.⁵⁶

Example 16. Rousseau, *Le devin du village*, Scene 6, mm.17-23

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is for a soprano voice, the middle for an alto voice, and the bottom for piano accompaniment. The key signature has two flats (B-flat major), and the time signature is 2/2. The lyrics are: "Je crains un A-mant vo-la-ge, Je me en-ga-ge mon tour, mon tour!" and "Ma Co-let-te se en-ga-ge. Je me en-ga-ge mon tour, mon tour!".

The debate was on Rousseau’s mind, and as Michael O’Dea observes in his book *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Music, Illustration, and Desire*: “Much of the energy of his work comes from the tensions inherent in each of these ideals and the movement between them.”⁵⁷ This is true enough, but perhaps O’Dea fails (as so many others have) to appreciate the extent to which, in *Le devin*, Rousseau achieved a point of equilibrium. It may be a “slight” work, and it often goes unmentioned in lengthy texts otherwise scrupulously devoted to assessing his artistic and philosophical achievement. Yet in its meaning it is not slight. In it, sophistication and simplicity come together, spontaneous, warm, individual expression and a sense of formal restraint and dignified propriety join hands – and a sense of joy is inseparable from the feeling that regret must never be forgotten. If this is not artistic, ethical, and philosophical achievement, then what would be?

Arthur M. Melzer has a chapter entitled “Curing Humanity: Rousseau’s Solution” in his *The Natural Goodness of Man: On the System of Rousseau’s*

⁵⁶ Strathern, *op. cit.*, 55.

⁵⁷ Michael O’Dea, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Music, Illusion, and Desire* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 6.

Thought in which, after dedicating most of a substantial paragraph to the paradoxes in Rousseau, he chastises those who think too swiftly that the “copresence of all these antitheses, which so many scholars have taken to represent a confusion, a contradiction, or a peculiar change of mind in Rousseau, are in fact just the opposite . . . a testament to the rigorous and unflinching consistency of his thought.”⁵⁸ It was Rousseau’s desire, he explains, to highlight these contradictions not to show, in a satiric manner (so common in his day) the supposedly unconquerable absurdity of humanity, but rather in order to encourage people to find a means to restore their lost unity. The “attainment of a formal unity,” Melzer notes, is something Rousseau believed humanity “must freely invent.”⁵⁹ Though neither Rousseau nor Melzer say so directly, this implies the need for aesthetics: that government must be like art; that honest religion, too, would proceed on an artistic basis.

One final point remains to be made. Without exception, every aria in this opera is cast in a dance rhythm. In and of itself, this is evidence of a profound attempt on Rousseau’s part to reconcile individual and collective feeling. An aria is an opportunity for the assertion of individual feeling, and yet community is always implied, since a steady dance beat always implies the need to coordinate community. Thus, with a lovely equipoise of individual and communal singing – Colette alternating with the community as a whole – and in an infectious, swinging 6/8 meter, *Le devin du village* ends with the call: *Allons danser !*

⁵⁸ Arthur M. Melzer, *The Natural Goodness of Man: On the System of Rousseau’s Thought* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), 91.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*